

**Testimony of Jean Graustein, Environmental Justice Ministry Coordinator of the
Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry of the Archdiocese of Hartford**

To the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committee on Children, February 5, 2015

Testimony in support of HB 5653, An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern for Children

Children, before and after birth, are uniquely vulnerable to harm from chemical exposures. The Roman Catholic Church, committed to protecting the right to life and the dignity of every person, supports legislation to better identify and understand the risks to children's health from unintended and unforeseen chemical exposures from consumer products, and to find effective ways to limit or eliminate these exposures.

Thousands of chemicals in consumer products have never been tested with regard to their risks to children, so their potential danger to children's health and development is unknown. Many chemicals are persistent and bio-accumulate in human bodies. Over 200 chemicals can be measured in the umbilical cord blood of most babies born in the U. S. and many are found in mothers' breast milk. Scientific studies are increasingly linking toxic chemicals with a range of negative health impacts, including hormonal and endocrine disruption, pre-term delivery, miscarriage, birth defects, breast cancer, and childhood cancers. Neurological and developmental disabilities from chemical exposures are often life-long, may not be treatable and, therefore, must be prevented.

Children in the womb are particularly vulnerable. As stated by the *Catholic Coalition for Children and a Safe Environment*, an alliance of 12 national Catholic health care, social service, religious and policy organizations: "Many chemicals can cross the placenta and may cause permanent damage to the child. Because children are exposed to environmental hazards at an earlier age than adults, they have more time to develop slowly progressing, environmentally triggered diseases. From conception through adolescence, they are in a dynamic, often sensitive state of growth as their immature nervous, respiratory, reproductive and immune systems develop. The effects upon children of many chemicals have still not been tested. While this does not mean we should or could live in a chemical free world, it does suggest more care and attention be given to environmental health protection."

Parents have a right to know what is in the products they buy and to which their children are exposed. HB 5653 would require the Commissioner of Public Health to identify chemicals that are potentially harmful to infants and children and to make this information known to relevant committees of the legislature so that public health of the most vulnerable can be better protected. We need action on this essential information to protect our children and grandchildren from harmful chemical exposures.

We urge the Joint Committee on Children to advance HB 5653. Thank you.